

At Jesus' feet

Mary of Bethany's life reveals an experience that must take place before effective witnessing happens.

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For years I have pondered why many pastors and parishioners have such an apathetic witness for Jesus. Then it hit me: we experience a progressive journey prior to witnessing. Mary of Bethany's life reveals this kind of progressive experience that must take place before effective witnessing can happen.

Waiting at Jesus' feet

Jesus and His disciples have come to Mary's home in Bethany. Although Martha opens her home to them, she becomes distracted with the necessary preparations. Time flies by. As she works hard in the kitchen (kneading the bread, for instance), sweat drips from her brow in anxiety about all that needs to be done as she prepares the meal. She usually enjoys being in the kitchen, but today something robs her of this satisfaction. Suddenly she bursts into the living room and confronts Jesus, “ ‘Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?’ ” ([Luke 10:40, NIV](#)).

Where has Mary gone? Martha finds her right there, in front of Jesus, sitting at His feet. His words have become more important than food. To her they mean life.

Mary's battles are different than Martha's. She senses deep within that only with the help of this Guest will she ever be victorious over herself and the weaknesses she struggles with. Now, to Mary's embarrassment, her sister exposes her before Jesus and His disciples with words suggesting that, as usual, she persists in being lazy and thoughtless.

“ ‘Martha, Martha, . . . you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her’ ” ([Luke 10:41, 42, NIV](#)).

Jesus vindicates her choice. Finally, someone acknowledges her right-doing, and this affirmation touches her heart and washes away her embarrassment. “ ‘One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it's the main course, and won't be taken from her’ ” ([Luke 10:41, *The Message*](#)).

Ellen White wrote that the “one thing” Martha needed was “a calm, devotional spirit, a deeper anxiety for knowledge concerning the future, immortal life, and the graces necessary for spiritual advancement.” But, she also acknowledges that the world needs Marthas and her careful and energetic devotion as they work for Him. “But,” White adds, “let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good.”¹

Jesus gave us the commission, “ ‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . .’ ” ([Matt. 28:19, NIV](#)). But we must remember that He had earlier invited them to Him by saying, “ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light’ ” ([Matt. 11:28–30, NIV](#)).

We may think of going as such a burden because we have not yet really come. We have not yet learned to sit at Jesus’ feet, to hang on every word, and to find rest for our souls and help for our battles. Before we can go we must first come! Ellen White confirms the scripture by reiterating what Scripture says, “Come, learn of Me, and in this coming we begin the life eternal.” Then she explains, “The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence.”²

Jesus tells the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the gift from the Father. “ ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . .’ ” ([Acts 1:8, NIV](#)). Like Mary, we must learn to wait at Jesus’ feet, while our seeking heart hangs on every word until we receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

Weeping at Jesus’ feet

Earlier Jesus, the invited Guest at Simon’s home, healed Simon the Pharisee from leprosy, and, on this occasion, Simon says Thank You in his own way. Martha stays in the kitchen, serving, perhaps, with more compassion and composure. Mary again kneels at Jesus’ feet but this time, instead of waiting, she weeps. She has experienced Jesus’ forgiveness for a sinful life, with her broken heart touched by His accepting love. Her heart also overflows with gratitude, remembering that her brother was raised from the tomb. (See [Matt. 26:6–13](#); [Mark 14:3–9](#); [Luke 7:36–50](#); [John 12:1–8](#).)

Being prompted to do something impulsive, as only a heart in love will do, she purchases an alabaster jar of perfume that cost her a full year’s income. She believes Jesus will be crucified, and, in her deep love and sorrow, she desires to honor Him. Then her intense grief turns to joy as she hears many say that soon He will be crowned King.

With a stir in the room as the fragrance captures everyone’s attention, Mary kneels at Jesus’ feet once again. While she washes His feet with her tears, she kisses them and pours her expensive perfume on them as well. She honors her Lord first before anyone else.

When that which we know in our heads makes the journey to our hearts, then we too will be prompted to do something extravagant for Him.

I remember being at a youth leaders’ conference and watching a first-person dramatization of Abraham climbing the mountain to sacrifice Isaac. My heart was touched and tears streamed down my face. Immediately after that presentation, I was driven from within to buy some resources that would be of help in my spiritual walk. I was amazed at what happened when my heart was touched by His Spirit’s power.

And someone told me the following story: Last week I was going for a walk and praying. I was very upset and literally hyperventilating. I'm thinking about what a bad spouse I am. I should be doing this and that and the other thing. What a fool I am. What a hypocrite!

But then I heard a very quiet whisper. I almost missed it. I said, "What?" Then I heard it again. "You belong to Me first. I'll take care of you. I won't let anything hurt you. Anything that comes against you has to come through Me first."

I just started crying I was so relieved.

That's the picture of Mary weeping at Jesus feet, her breaking heart full and overflowing with His love.

But this consciousness of His presence comes only after waiting at His feet.

Worshipping at Jesus' feet

The next portrait of Mary occurs early Sunday morning. She goes to the tomb, but the stone has been rolled away. Excited and out of breath, she exclaims to Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" ([John 20:2, NIV](#)).

Mary lingers at the tomb after Peter and John leave. Weeping, she looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting where she had helped place His broken and bruised body on Friday evening.

"Woman, why are you crying?" they ask.

"They have taken my Lord away," she replies, "and I don't know where they have put him." She doesn't recognize the One standing behind her as she turns and says, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." She knows of an empty tomb that could be used for His body.

Then Jesus says to her, "Mary." Instantly, she recognizes Him and falls to His feet in adoration.

"Teacher," she exclaims in joy and adoration, her heart overcome with exuberance as she worships at the feet of the One whom she so absolutely adores. Jesus insists that she stop clinging to Him so He can return to His Father. "Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (See [John 20:10-17](#).)

The power

And now Mary goes to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" ([John 20:18, NIV](#)). Mary doesn't need a course on how to be a witness. She doesn't need to be trained in the most effective evangelistic techniques. She doesn't need to learn how to do DVD evangelism or how to give Bible studies. She doesn't need any of that because *she has seen the Lord*.

Mary's seeking heart has waited at Jesus' feet. Mary's broken heart has wept at Jesus' feet. Mary's new heart has worshiped at Jesus' feet. And now, experiencing Jesus' amazing love she becomes a powerful witness for Him. In the same way, we will become powerful witnesses but only when we wait at His feet, seek Him with our whole heart, weep at His feet with a breaking heart, and worship Him with a new heart.

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